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ABSTRACT

New research shows that the involvement of both mothers and fathers is important to children's education. Recognizing that promoting fathers' involvement depends greatly on the knowledge, attitudes, and skills of the teachers, administrators, child care providers, and social support staff, this report is designed to inform, promote, and celebrate fathers' increased participation in children's learning. Section 1 of the report describes research on the benefits of family involvement and includes a discussion of how father's involvement in learning contributes to student educational success. Section 2 provides a discussion of strategies for improving and extending fathers' involvement in their children's education, whether or not they reside with the child. Section 3 provides examples of programs that involve fathers in children's learning and their practices. A comprehensive list of organizations and Internet resources is appended. Includes a fact sheet on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. (Contains 20 references.) (HTH)

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A Call to Commitment:

Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning

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Fathers' Involvement in Children's Learning

U.S. Department of Education
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June 2000

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INTRODUCTION

There is overwhelming evidence that a parent's involvement in a child's education makes a very positive difference. In the past, often an unstated assumption was made that "parent involvement" meant "mothers' involvement." New research shows that the involvement of both mother *and* father is important. Given this finding, together with the lack of previous work on expanding fathers' involvement, this report describes new opportunities in this area.

Research has shown that fathers, no matter what their income or cultural background, can play a critical role in their children's education. When fathers are involved, their children learn more, perform better in school, and exhibit healthier behavior. Even when fathers do not share a home with their children, their active involvement can have a lasting and positive impact.

At the U.S. Department of Education, we are working to make sure that the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education recognizes and includes fathers as well as mothers. Our colleagues at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services are also working for fuller recognition and inclusion of fathers in all of their programs, policies and research.

We know that promoting fathers' involvement depends greatly on the knowledge, attitudes and skills of the teachers, administrators, childcare providers and social support staff who work with families every day. We also know that many of these professionals have not been exposed to the latest research and practices regarding fathers' involvement.

On October 28, 1999, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services jointly convened a national satellite teleconference to begin offering educators and other providers of services to children the ideas, strategies and tools they need to successfully involve fathers in children's learning, including readiness to learn at home, at school and in the community. The activities of both agencies were part of a broader government-wide effort in response to President Clinton's Executive Memorandum on Fatherhood issued in June 1995. These efforts also reflect Vice President Gore's long-standing leadership for involving fathers in their children's lives, beginning with a Family Reunion Conference on this topic in 1994.

This publication is designed to inform, promote, and celebrate fathers' increased participation in children's learning. We have seen a growth in programs to support fathers in becoming actively involved in their children's learning at school, at early childhood development centers, at childcare centers and throughout the community. The question is, How can we increase this momentum based upon what we have learned and accomplished?

Section I of this report provides the research context for the topic of fathers' involvement. It describes research on the benefits of family involvement and includes a discussion of

how fathers' involvement in learning contributes to student educational success. Current research tells us about the kind and scope of fathers' involvement in education for fathers who are part of two-parent families or single-parent families, or are nonresident fathers. The section concludes with a discussion of the primary barriers to family involvement in children's education–all of which contribute to fathers' isolation from their children's learning.

Section II provides a discussion of strategies for improving and extending fathers' involvement in their children's education, whether they are resident or nonresident dads. There is agreement that responsibility for parents' (generally) and fathers' (specifically) involvement in children's education must also be shared by schools and educators, as well as by early childhood development centers and the larger community. The many recommendations made to educators, childcare providers and other community partners for supporting parent involvement in children's learning include some special tips for recruiting fathers' participation.

Section III provides examples of programs that involve fathers in children's learning and their practices. The comprehensive list of organizational and Internet resources in the appendices extends the reader's access to additional information, strategies and programs related to family and fathers' support of their children's learning. Particular resources that support family involvement in education that are available from the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services are also in the appendices. References cited in this publication follow the appendices.

Finally, a fact sheet on the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education and a form the reader may fill out to receive more information about family involvement complete the publication.

I THE CONTEXT: WHAT RESEARCH TELLS US

Benefits of Family Involvement in Education

Families are considered the primary context of children's development. Whether children are "ready" for school and experience success throughout their school career depends, in large part, on their physical well-being, social development, cognitive skills and knowledge and how they approach learning (NCES, 2000). Family characteristics and home experiences also contribute to this readiness and later success. If families don't provide the necessary support and resources that their children need to increase their chances of succeeding in school, their children are placed at increased risk for school failure (Macoby, 1992).

It is well documented that family involvement is a "win/win" for both students and schools. Thirty years of research shows that students benefit by achieving higher grades, better attendance and homework completion, more positive attitudes toward school, higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in college.

Enhanced performance can be measured by such things as a student getting mostly As, his or her enjoyment of school and his or her involvement in extracurricular activities. These last two measures are probably as important as the first. After all, children who enjoy school are more likely to perform better academically and to remain in school (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). And, participation in extracurricular activities reduces the risk of poor behavior, dropping out of school, becoming a teen parent and using drugs (Zill, Nord & Loomis, 1995).

Schools benefit by improved teacher morale, higher ratings of teachers by parents, more support from families and better reputations in the community (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

What's Special About Fathers' Involvement?

Research shows that students perform better academically, have fewer discipline problems, and become more responsible adults when their parents are actively involved in their learning. But, over the years, "parent involvement" often has meant "mothers' involvement." In schools, pre-schools and Head Start

What Our Children Tell Us

"My parents, like, want me to have the best education I can have. So, if my parents weren't involved, I might not get as good a teacher or something like that. And, it might affect my grades or my learning." (1999 National Teleconference)

"I don't think parents need to be in the building or like active in the classrooms or PTA, but I think they need to know what their child is learning. I think they need to know the homework situation, and how they can help their kid if their kid needs help. I think children should know that they can come to their parents." (1999 National Teleconference)

programs, and within the family itself, it has been assumed often that mothers have the primary responsibility for encouraging the children's learning and development. These assumptions miss the importance of fathers' involvement. In addition, the adverse effects of a father's absence on the development of his children are well documented. Nevertheless, over half of the children in the United States will spend part of their childhood in a single-parent home (Cherlin, 1992).

Following are some areas in which fathers' involvement has significant effects on children.

Modeling adult male behavior. Fathers demonstrate to their children that male adults can take responsibility, help to establish appropriate conduct, and provide a daily example of how to deal with life, how to dress, how to regulate closeness and distance, and the importance of achievement and productivity. If they have an active religious or spiritual life, fathers, like mothers, can serve as models in that area as well (Hoffman, 1971).

Making choices. Children glean from their fathers a range of choices about everything from clothing to food to devotion to a great cause. This promotes positive moral values, conformity to rules and the development of conscience (Hoffman, 1971).

Problem solving abilities. Research shows that even very young children who have experienced high father involvement show an increase in curiosity and in problem solving capacity. Fathers' involvement seems to encourage children's exploration of the world around them and confidence in their ability to solve problems (Pruett, 2000).

Providing financial and emotional support. Economic support is one significant part of a father's influence on his children. Another is the concrete forms of emotional support that he gives to the children's mother. That support enhances the overall quality of the mother-child relationship, for example when dads ease moms' workloads by getting involved with the children's homework (Abramovitch in Lamb, 1997).

Highly involved fathers also contribute to increased mental dexterity in children, increased empathy, less stereotyped sex-role beliefs and greater self-control. And when fathers are more

What Our Children Tell Us

From an 18-year-old: "They (parents) were extremely involved because they had such a stake in it. My dad would go to PTA meetings. They have always wanted to get involved, always making sure that I was getting everything out of the school that I could. I'm extremely glad now because I think it did a lot to shape me." (Galinsky, 1999)

From a 12-year-old: "I miss him. He's gone for short times. He calls from where he is. I'd rather have him at home during that time, but I know he has to do it because it's part of his job." (Galinsky, 1999)

actively involved, children are more likely to have solid marriages later in life. (Abramovitch in Lamb, 1997).

Enhancing student performance. In families where both the father and the mother are highly involved with their children's school, the children enjoy several advantages.

- Children's enjoyment of school is enhanced.

- In two-parent families where fathers are highly involved in children's schools, students are more likely to get top grades and enjoy school than in families where fathers have low involvement, even after taking into account a variety of other child and family conditions that may influence learning. In these circumstances, the chances that children will get mostly As are higher when the father is highly involved than when the mother is highly involved (NCES, 1997).

- In general, children have better educational outcomes as long as either the mother or the father is highly involved. Children do best when both parents are highly involved.

- When parents are highly involved in their children's schools, the parents are more likely to visit museums and libraries, participate in cultural activities with their children, and have high educational expectations for them. (NCES, 1997).

What Our Children Tell Us

"I can't spend much time with him because he's working. Sometimes I go with him to work on the weekends. But I just wish that he wouldn't work so much." (Galinsky, 1999)

From a 14-year-old: "If a child has something to say, listen to them. They might teach you something." (Galinsky, 1999)

While children do best when both parents are highly involved, as long as either the mother or father is highly involved in their school's activities, children have better educational outcomes in general than those whose parents are not so involved. For example, in single-parent families headed by fathers, with higher father involvement:

- Thirty-two percent of children in grades K-12 got mostly As compared to 17 percent of those with low-involvement fathers;

- Eleven percent of children in grades K-12 were suspended or expelled compared to 34 percent of

those with low-involvement fathers;

- Thirteen percent of children in grades K-12 repeated a grade compared to 18 percent of those with low-involvement fathers; and

- Forty-four percent of children enjoyed school compared to 30 percent of those with low-involvement fathers (NCES, 1997).

- Children do better academically when their fathers are involved in their schools, whether or not their fathers live with them, or whether or not their mothers are involved. When non-custodial fathers are highly involved with their children's learning, the children are more likely to get As at all grade levels (NCES, 1997).

What Our Children Tell Us

From a 17-year-old about a nonresident father: "I get very angry at him. There're some things that I think he should do, but he doesn't. My school is really family oriented; we have Mother-Daughter this, Father-Daughter that. I would invite him and he'd be like, 'No, I don't want to go,' and it's like well, I mean, I think we should. It's like we don't have quality time really, cause I mean we don't spend time together like that." (Galinsky, 1999)

Fathers' Involvement in Education

Kind and scope of family involvement. High involvement by the father or mother can make a positive difference for children's learning across grades K-12.

High involvement at the early childhood level refers to the frequency with which parents interact with their young children, such as how often they read, tell stories, and sing and play with their children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). These experiences contribute to children's language and literacy development and transmit information and knowledge about people, places and things.

For purposes of this report, high involvement in school-related activities means that a parent has done three or more of these activities during a school year: attended a general school meeting, attended a regularly scheduled parent-teacher conference, attended a general school or class event and served as a volunteer at school. Parents are said to have low involvement in their children's schools if they have done none or only one of the four activities (NCES, 1997).

In 1999, the National Center for Fathering conducted a national telephone survey researching involvement among resident and non-resident fathers. Given what we know about the effects of high involvement, the results were staggering. Over 40 percent

of fathers had never read to their school-aged children.

The National Household Education Survey of 1996 (discussed in NCES, 1997) collected data on the academic achievement of students and their family's involvement in their schools during the first quarter of 1996. Phone interviews were conducted with parents and guardians of over 20,700 children from three years old to twelfth-graders. Here's what the survey found about the overall kind and scope of family involvement.

- The most common involvement activity in which parents participate is a general school meeting, such as a back-to-school night.
- Most parents do participate in at least some of the activities in their children's schools. But parents in two-parent homes tend to divide the task of involvement between them. To save time, one or the other will attend, but usually not both.
- Parents who are highly involved in their children's schools are more likely to also be involved at home. Similarly, families who are involved in their children's schools tend to share other activities with their children as well.
- Highly involved parents are more likely than all others to believe that their children will get further education after high school and will graduate from a four-year college.
- Highly involved parents offer their children greater connections to the larger community. These parents are more likely to belong to an organization such as a community group, church, synagogue, union or professional organization. They are also more likely to participate in an ongoing service activity and to attend religious services on a weekly basis.
- Parents are more likely to be highly involved if their children attend private, as opposed to public, schools. But private schools often make parental involvement a requirement; thus, part of the higher involvement may be a matter of school policy.

What Parents Tell Us

A father of a nine-year-old boy: "Time is something, once it's gone, it's gone forever. So, you can look back and think, 'Well, gee, I wish I would have spent more time with my kids when they were younger. I wish I would've spent more time with them when they were in high school,' whatever. But once time is gone, that's it." (Galinsky, 1999)

In the mornings, "We got to ride in the car together – we had a good time in the car. We could say a few nice words to each other and start the day in the right way." (Galinsky, 1999)

- High involvement in schools tends to decrease as school size increases.

Other sources add to the research on the kind and scope of family involvement.

- Parents tend to decrease their involvement as their children move up the educational ladder. This decrease may be due to parents' idea that involvement in schools is not as important as children grow up. Additionally, there have been fewer opportunities for parental involvement as children become older (Zill and Nord, 1994).

- Parents are more involved when they are confident that they can be of assistance to the child, when they believe that the child is capable of doing well in school and when they have high educational aspirations for the child (Abramovitch in Lamb, 1997).

Two-parent families: kind and scope of fathers' involvement. The involvement of one parent in a two-parent home motivates the other parent to be involved. However, dads are less likely than moms to attend a parent-teacher conference or volunteer at school. Stepparents are less likely to be involved than natural or adoptive parents.

Parent level of education appears to be a more important influence on parent involvement than is family income. For example, nearly 60 percent of first-time kindergartners were read to every day by a family member if one or more parents had a bachelor's degree or higher while less than 40 percent of first-time kindergartners were read to every day by a family member if that member had less than a high school education (NCES, 2000).

As the labor force participation rate of mothers with young children has increased, so has the percentage of children receiving child care from someone other than their parents before entering first grade (West et al., 1993) or during their kindergarten and primary school years (Brimhall et al., 1999). Those kindergarten children whose mothers have less than a high school education are more likely to receive before- and/or after-school care from a relative than from a non-relative or center-based provider (NCES, 2000).

Full-time maternal employment (mothers who work 35 or more hours per week) reduces maternal involvement at all grade levels. However, at all grade levels, fathers with full-time working wives have more involvement than fathers without full-time working wives (NCES, 1997).

Parental involvement in schools is closely linked to parental involvement at home. Higher father involvement is particularly related to the number of activities the family participates in with the children, the frequency with which a parent helps with homework and whether a parent regularly participates in a community service activity.

In general, fathers' involvement in their children's schools decreases as children grow older. The decline may also be attributed to the school offering fewer opportunities for parental involvement as children grow older. However, the pattern of decline differs between fathers in two-parent families and those in single-father families.

- In two-parent families, the proportion of children with highly involved fathers drops from 30 percent to 25 percent between elementary (grades K-5) and middle school (grades 6-8), but then drops only slightly, to 23 percent, in high school (grades 9-12).

- Among children living in single-father families, there is no decrease in the proportion that have highly involved fathers between elementary and middle schools (53 percent at both grade levels), but a large decrease between middle and high school (to 27 percent) (NCES, 1997).

Single-parent families: fathers' involvement. Single fathers are more likely to be involved with students in grades 6-8 than with those in high school. For older children in grades 6 - 12, discussion of future educational plans increases their dads' involvement. Children of any age getting mostly As is not related to the involvement of single dads as it is among fathers in two-parent families (NCES, 1997).

Involvement of nonresident fathers. Involvement of nonresident dads is substantially lower than that of dads in two-parent homes. Nonresident father contact with children *and* involvement in their schools within the past year are associated with the same three factors:

- Fathers paying child support;

- Custodial mothers being more educated; and

- Custodial homes not experiencing financial difficulties.

Nonresident fathers tend to become less involved with their children's schooling as the children grow up. These nonresident dads are more likely to be involved in their children's education if the mothers have not remarried (NCES, 1997).

Barriers to Fathers' Involvement

Strategies that strengthen family involvement in education must take into account barriers that confront families, schools and communities. According to a 1992 National Center for Fathering Gallup Poll, 96 percent of those surveyed agreed that fathers need to be more involved in their children's education. Furthermore, 54 percent agreed that fathers spend less time with their children than their fathers did with them, and only 42

percent agree that most fathers know what is going on in their children's lives. Why are fathers not more involved in their children's education?

Getting fathers into the school building. Some schools, preschools and childcare programs don't have family-friendly environments and are not organized to work with families. Also, when parents are invited into the schools or centers, fathers are less likely, on average, to respond to these invitations for involvement. Why? Part of the reason is that parents often assume that such invitations are for mothers only. Though incorrect, that assumption is understandable: in our society, the word *parent* in the school context and others has often been interpreted to mean *mother*. Moreover, some parents believe that schooling should be left to the education experts, and the family's role is one of caring and nurturing outside of school.

Institutional practices. Fathers ranked institutional practices and barriers imposed by the workplace as the most important reasons for their low levels of involvement. Paternity leave is the most frequently discussed means of enhancing paternal involvement, even though some research indicates that flextime schedules would be of greater value in encouraging fathers' involvement (Abramovitch in Lamb, 1997).

Language and cultural barriers. Some fathers can't read or are functionally illiterate. Or, they can't communicate in English. They are embarrassed to come to school and interact with educators because they lack, or may believe they lack, these necessary communication skills.

Disconnected community-based organizations. Community-based organizations that attract families with children, such as churches and childcare centers, are often disconnected from schools. They operate their own programs within their neighborhood centers. They are missed opportunities to link families with schools. Recently, there have been expanded attempts to link school and community through these organizations. The Department's Partnership for Family Involvement in Education represents one such effort. The results look promising.

Education of parents. Parents' education is a more significant factor than family income in whether or not they will be involved in their children's education. The less education mom and dad have, the less likely they are to be involved. Not surprisingly, if they are highly involved with their children at home, they are more likely to be involved at school.

Lack of time. Today's workers are increasingly asked to do more with less, and thus work longer hours. Dual-career families may face scheduling conflicts and have less control over work hours, further aggravating the balancing act of work and family.

Not knowing what to do. Parents generally, and fathers specifically, may not know how to assist their children with their education. Parents can be intimidated by new,

unfamiliar course content, higher expectations for learning and computer technology. Their response may be to do nothing.

Unsafe neighborhoods. Unsafe conditions in neighborhoods can also isolate parents from schools. Safety concerns restrict families from traveling to schools, particularly after dark.

Spousal/adult support. The involvement of one parent in a two-parent home tends to spur the involvement of the other. If dad is not involved, mom may not get involved, and vice versa. Fathers may need the support of their wives to overcome the disconnectedness that plagues some fathers today, and mothers may need help adjusting to fathers' desire to be involved.

Separation/divorce processes. Divorce severely impacts a father's ability to be involved with his children. In 82 percent of marital breakups today, fathers do not have custody of their children (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1996). This in turn contributes to academic, social, mental and physical difficulties for children (Pruett, 2000).

II STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

There are strategies to reduce obstacles to fathers' involvement in education. To help dads warm up and get involved with their children means to convince them of the significance of small, very simple interactions with their children--interactions that may seem very insignificant to the dads, but mean a great deal to their children.

It is important to remember up front that both sensitivity and self-confidence are greater than any specific skills in paternal behavior and influence. Sensitivity is critical to both involvement and closeness. The closeness of the father-child relationship is the crucial determinant of the dad's impact on a child's development and adjustment. Developing sensitivity enables a dad to evaluate his child's signals or needs, and respond to them appropriately. (Abramovitch in Lamb, 1997).

What Fathers Can Do at Home, at School and in the Community

Fathers can initiate or participate in activities that help their children succeed academically. Helping children learn can increase success in school. The nature and frequency with which parents interact in positive ways with their children reflect the parents' investment in their children's education (NCES, 2000). Here are some steps that fathers can take at home, at school and in the community that make a positive difference for their children's education.

At home, fathers can:

- **Read with their children**. The ability to read well is known to be one of the most critical skills a child needs to be successful. Parents and caregivers often ask how they can get their children interested in reading, interested enough to turn off the TV and to read on their own?

  Years of research show that the best way is for the parent to serve as a model reader by reading to the child and by reading themselves. If the father can't read the text, he can stimulate his child's imagination by telling stories using a picture book. In addition, he can ask other significant adults to read to younger children and ask older children to read to him. He can take frequent trips to the library with the child to check out books and get to know the children's librarian and children's library programs.

- **Establish a daily routine.** Fathers can set a time for homework, chores and other activities; use TV wisely by limiting viewing to no more than two hours a school day; and work with their child on homework and special projects, guiding them through the steps involved and encouraging them along the way. Parents don't need to have in-depth knowledge of a subject, but can be

supportive of their child in working through tough spots in her or his school work.

- **Make the most of bedtime**. Bedtime is a terrific opportunity for fathers to connect with their children. For one thing, the audience is definitely captive! There are also fewer distractions. But perhaps most importantly, there is no one standing by with a scorecard rating the dad on his performance.

  At bedtime, a father can enrich a child's life merely by recounting what he did during the day. Discussing the day's events shows interest in the child and builds his or her knowledge. A father may also tell or read a story. Every moment he spends and every word he says builds a relationship with his child.

At school and other childcare and child development programs, fathers can:

- **Participate in efforts to keep their children's schools or childcare centers safe.**
- **Plan for the future** by talking with their children and school counselors about future high school courses and postsecondary career options.
- **Attend parent-teacher conferences and school or class events.**
- **Volunteer at school**. Fathers are welcome at schools as tutors, as leaders of afternoon or evening clubs, as chaperons for field trips, social activities or athletic events, or as classroom speakers who share information about their work and the world of work and how education contributed to their expertise on the job.
- **Visit their child's school or center.** Father-child breakfasts or lunches are good opportunities to informally share a meal with children and learn about their daily school experiences, successes and concerns.
- **Meet their child's teachers** and learn about school curriculum, and how to become involved in activities.
- **Pitch in to help meet school and program needs**, such as installing new playground equipment, cooking at a school picnic or painting and repairing school property.
- **Join the Parent Teacher Association or other parent groups** at their child's school or childcare center. At meetings, they can make their voices heard regarding their concerns and ideas for school improvement.

In the community, fathers can:

- **Play or coach a game or sport** they like with their children on a regular basis.
- **Become involved in community activities** by joining a community group, place of worship, union or professional group to participate with their children in an ongoing service activity.

- **Take time for family outings** to places such as libraries, zoos, museums, concerts and sports events or other recreational events.
- **Use their community learning center** to participate in after-school and evening educational and recreational activities such as English as a Second Language, parenting, literacy, arts and music programs and crafts or computer classes. These courses are often designed for parents and their children to learn together.

What Schools, Educators, Programs and Providers Can Do

Most schools, preschools and Head Start programs want to involve parents in their children's learning. They offer information about learning at home and child-rearing issues. They hold back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences and athletic events to promote parental involvement. Schools and centers keep families informed of their children's progress and performance through ongoing contact including newsletters, conferences, telephone calls and e-mail.

In order to engage fathers more fully as partners in children's learning, schools, programs and providers need to challenge the assumption that parent involvement means only *mothers'* involvement by proactively encouraging fathers to be part of the family learning team. A "family friendly environment" must also mean a "father friendly environment" and a "mother friendly environment."

How can schools take the lead to expand fathers' involvement in their children's education?

Use the National PTA Standards as a guide. The National PTA Standards for Parent/Family Involvement Programs clearly outline six types of parent involvement in education. Use these PTA standards to evaluate what your school is doing and to identify areas you would like to strengthen for working with families, especially fathers. These are:

- **Communicating**–Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- **Parenting**–Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- **Student Learning**–Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- **Volunteering**–Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.
- **School Decision-Making and Advocacy**–Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- **Collaborating with Community**–Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning. (National PTA, 1997)

Communicate with fathers. Whether fathers are in two-parent families or single-parent families, or are nonresident fathers, they should be encouraged to be actively involved in their children's education and in supporting the school, preschool or Head Start program through volunteer work.

- **Provide nonresident fathers** with student progress reports and other important information as well as the mother.

- **School notices**: Mothers and fathers should know they are welcome at school and should receive communications from school. If mother and father live in the same home, address school notices to both of them—not just to the mother. If one parent does not live in the same home as the child, that parent should also receive notices from the school unless there is a legal reason to the contrary. Discretion should also be used in cases where separation exists for the protection of family members.

Expect fathers' involvement. If educators and childcare providers do not see fathers involved, it is natural for them to assume that fathers do not want to be involved. However, it is often the case that fathers and mothers do not think the schools and centers want dad to be involved. The best way to break out of this "chicken-and-egg" dilemma is to communicate clearly to all parents that fathers and mothers as well are *expected* to be involved. There are many simple ways to do this.

- **Enrollment forms**: When enrolling a child in your school or early childhood development program, ask explicitly for the father's name, address and phone numbers.

- **Calls home**: When calling a child's home, do not assume that you have to speak to the mother. Your completed enrollment form will give you an indication of whether dad resides in the same household.

- **School or center meetings**: When inviting parents to a meeting, make clear that you would like and expect both parents to attend, if possible. It may be necessary to reschedule some meeting times to ensure that mother *and* father are able to attend.

- **Alternatives to volunteering:** Let fathers know that parent involvement does not only mean volunteering at school, preschool or Head Start program. Helping their child learn at home or outside of school are important forms of involvement.

Provide information and training to parents and school or center staff. For many dads, fathering education would positively affect their ability to impact their child's education. Schools, centers and programs can provide classes or sessions on building a warm, caring relationship with children that includes strategies like: listening to a child's problems,

giving advice, explaining rules, monitoring school performance, helping with homework, engaging in projects and giving praise and using discipline, without the use of physical force, to deal with misbehavior. Note that many nonresident dads put the emphasis on having "fun" while they are with their children because they do not want to risk starting a conflict.

Teaching mothers and fathers how to tutor their children in basic subjects and/or help their children, for example with motor skills development has also been designated as an area of need. This support to children's learning can be given through home visits or at parent workshops in schools or other childcare and community centers.

For school staff, information and training could include technical assistance on topics such as making home visits and positive phone calls, appreciating diversity and family strengths, developing skills for parent-teacher conferences that address both mothers' and fathers' questions and concerns and helping families become stronger learning environments.

Establish family resource centers in schools. In centers, parents can read or borrow books on parenting, meet informally with teachers, attend small workshops, and learn of local jobs, services and programs. Provide books, workshops and meetings specifically for fathers.

Adjust school and childcare activity schedules to meet family needs. Host father-child breakfasts before the work day begins or dinners after work so that fathers can meet teachers. childcare providers and other school or center staff.

Create a father friendly environment. Many men feel uncomfortable visiting their children's school for reasons that school personnel may not even realize. If a father did not do well in school himself, he may feel insecure any time he enters a school setting. There are many easy ways to make fathers feel welcome. Include fathers in parent/teacher conferences, after-school and extracurricular activities, in mentoring and tutoring activities and in making classroom presentations on careers and the educational preparation needed for these careers. Holding specially designed support groups for dads encourages them to focus on common issues of importance to them.

- **Warm greetings**. Nothing breaks the ice like a warm welcome. Greet fathers by name when they attend school events, and tell them how glad you are to see them.

- **Recognize children's progress**. All parents love to hear good news about their children. Whether fathers are visiting school or a center for regularly scheduled meetings, or because their child is having some particular problem, find something positive to say about their child's progress.

- **Reinforce fathers' contributions**. All parents want to know – and rarely hear – that they are contributing to their children's education. If you recognize the contribution a father is making to his child's learning, he will be more likely to want to return.

- **Father-to-father strategies**. Develop strategies and programs that encourage older fathers to mentor young fathers and young fathers to mentor first-time fathers.

- **Parent-teacher meetings**. When fathers attend parent-teacher meetings, make sure to include them in the discussion. Too often dads feel as if they were the invisible figure at what was, in effect, a "mother-teacher" meeting. Teacher body language is a good sign of whether or not dad is being included. Is your chair swiveled towards mom? Is your eye contact mostly with mom? Are you inviting questions from the father as well as the mother?

- **Images on display**. Posters, photos and drawings on the walls of classrooms and hallways can send a powerful message to parents about who is welcome in the school. Check the images you have on display to verify whether fathers are welcome in your school.

- **Find out what fathers want.** One of the most effective but least used ways to involve fathers is to find out what interests them about their child's school or childcare program and what they would like to contribute to the school.

Deal with resistance to change. Although all staff members are likely to agree with the *idea* of getting fathers more involved in children's learning, their *feelings* are often otherwise. The same goes for mothers. For example, women who have been abused or abandoned by men may have reservations about reaching out to fathers. Dealing with emotional resistance to the involvement of fathers in children's learning is not easy, but it is important.

- **Group discussions** can be an effective way to identify feelings and to help people realize they are not the only ones with those feelings. A staff group or a group of mothers can gather to discuss their relationships with their own fathers while they were growing up, what it would have meant to have their own fathers more involved and what it would take to involve more fathers in children's learning. To channel what will be an emotional discussion in the most constructive way, consider having a trained professional from your staff – a psychologist or social worker – serve as the discussion leader.

- **Men and women together**. Under the direction of a skilled group leader, a dialogue between mothers and fathers can be a very effective way to learn what's keeping men from being more involved – and what it would take for them to become more involved.

Staff early school positions with males. Staffing childcare facilities (infant to school-age care) with male teachers and other caregivers helps make dads more comfortable and feel that their stake in their children's success is as great as the mothers'. Attendance at parent conferences increases when a greater number of fathers and other males related to the child are involved (Braver and Griffin, 1996).

What Other Community Partners Can Do

Employers can:

- **Offer more flexible work schedules** so fathers can take time off to attend and become involved in school and related educational activities, such as parent-teacher conferences, the Parent Teacher Association, field trips, athletic events and other social activities.

- **Initiate volunteer programs** that encourage employees to become mentors, coaches and tutors or to help improve schools' technology infrastructure, buildings and grounds.

- **Offer fatherhood and parenting education** sessions for interested dads.

- **Provide information services** to parents related to postsecondary education and training for their children.

Communities can:

- **Encourage civic, service, religious and charitable groups to promote responsible fatherhood** within their membership and across the country.

- **Open their facilities to encourage after-school and evening educational and recreational activities and courses** for children and their parents.

- **Provide opportunities for communitywide social and recreational events** for families.

- **Organize school, family, community college and university and public and community agency support** for families within their community.

III EXAMPLES OF PROGRAMS THAT ENGAGE FATHERS IN CHILDREN'S LEARNING

The following father involvement programs are examples of how communities across the country are meeting the need to support fathers' involvement in children's learning. These examples are by no means exhaustive; they are intended to illustrate the kinds of fathers' involvement programs that are working in schools, childcare centers and communities.

- The **Buhrer Elementary School** (Pre-K-5), Cleveland, Ohio, provides family math courses for mothers and fathers and all home-school communications are in at least two languages. The school has organized block parent meetings that are held at locations other than school so that those parents who cannot come to the school for meetings can address issues nearer to home with school staff who attend. *Results*: 18-20 parents attend a typical block meeting with an annually increasing number of block parents attending school functions.

- At **Cane Run Elementary School** (K-5), Louisville, Kentucky, families participate in the Even Start Program, with parents studying for the General Education Diploma while children are in school or the on-site nursery. The school's Family Resource Center links fathers and mothers to many community services, and runs after-school tutoring and recreational programs for children. *Results*: PTA membership and the number of mothers **and** fathers visiting the school building daily have both been multiplied by a factor of 10. During the last two years, discipline referrals have declined 30 percent each year while attendance has maintained a steady 94 percent.

- **R.E.A.D. to Kids--Reconnecting Education and Dads**, Kansas City, Missouri, is a project of the Urban Fathering Project. This activity helps dads develop a reading program for their children. *Results*: Over 450 dads in 12 schools participated in the program in its first year.

- **Kindering Center** (Pre-K and elementary), Bellevue, Washington, has established a weekly support group for fathers of children with special needs, run by the National Fathering Network. It now has affiliates in 35 states. *Results*: Enrollment has grown from 25 to 100 participating fathers, all of whom are better able to manage the stresses of having a child with special needs.

- **Avance Child and Family Development Program,** (Pre-K) San Antonio, Texas, offers a 33-week fatherhood curriculum, covering topics such as child growth and development, handling stress, learning to live without violence, and childhood illnesses. The program also offers a General Education Diploma and English as a Second Language classes. *Results*: The program teaches parenting and personal skills to more than 60 men per year, encourages fathers' involvement with their children, and strengthens relationships with their children's mothers.

- The **Mary Hooker Elementary School Family Resource Center** in Hartford, Connecticut, primarily serves Puerto Rican low-income families who are either bilingual in Spanish and English or speak Spanish as their primary language. Program activities with fathers, conducted in both English and Spanish, are often held evenings or on Saturdays. Activities include parenting classes, picnics, field trips and early education classes. Babysitting is provided as needed. *Results*: Many of the 250 parents who attended the program's parental involvement meeting also attended the meeting's fatherhood workshop.

- The **Pinellas County Head Start's Accepting the Leadership Challenge** in Florida, a male involvement initiative, began by taking 30 men away for the weekend and leading them through a bonding exercise which helped them to form a group. The program offers fathers training in parenting, nutrition, literacy and computers; educational travel; and opportunities for successful family time. *Results*: Now in its ninth year, the number of male involvement groups has expanded.

- At the **Fairfax-San Anselmo Children's Center** (pre-K and after-school), Fairfax, California, on one Saturday per month, as part of the Men's Breakfast Program, fathers first have breakfast with their children, then have a fathers-only discussion led by the center director, and then rejoin their children to do yard work and other fixing up of the center. *Results*: Before the program, very few fathers participated in parent-teacher meetings or other aspects of center life; now, virtually all fathers participate.

- The **Florence S. Brown Pre-K Program**, Rochester, New York, holds one lunchtime meeting per month and one evening meeting per month. Both of these meetings bring fathers to the center to spend time in the classroom with their children and to do handiwork and yardwork (for example, fixing broken toys, repairing the playground). *Results*: Fathers took a lead role in a successful lobbying effort to prevent cutbacks in state funding for the entire Pre-K program.

- At the **Sunbelt Human Advancement Resources, Inc. Head Start** (SHARE) in Greenville, South Carolina, male volunteers visit men at the Perry Correctional Center to provide inmate fathers with information on Head Start and its services to children and families, as well as mentoring and life-skills training. *Results*: visits to the correctional center provide male involvement volunteers with ideas for their mentoring program with youth in group homes to prevent these young boys from becoming a part of the justice system.

- **Parents as Teachers** (Pre-K), St. Louis, Missouri, is a statewide program, widely recognized as a national model, that advocates that parents are children's first teachers. The Ferguson-Florissant High School has adapted this program for teen parents and parents-to-be, offering both "Dads Only" and "Moms Only" classes. The school also runs a preschool-based "Messy Activities" night to encourage fathers to play with their children. *Results*: There has been increasing involvement by fathers in families who participate in the program.

- At **Hueco Elementary School** (Pre-K-6), El Paso, Texas, all parents participate in the "Super Readers" program, which provides incentives for parents to read with their children. About 20-30 parents attend monthly Parent Communication Council meetings and teachers receive release time to conduct home visits. *Results*: Parents involved in at least one activity at school increased from 30 percent to 80 percent per year. Parent participation has increased to include school decision-making, classroom instruction, furthering their own educational goals, and helping children more at home.

- At **Roosevelt High School** (9-12), Dallas, Texas, teams of faculty, parents and other community leaders walk door-to-door during their "Walk for Success." These teams talk with parents about their needs, interests and school improvement. Parents of sophomores attend classes about state tests and a parent liaison makes 30-60 calls to parents per day to reinforce communication between home and school. *Results:* Attendance at PTA meetings increased by a factor of 20. Student achievement on state tests rose from the 40th percentile to the 81st percentile in reading, and from the 16th to the 70th percentile in math.

- **The Illinois Fatherhood Initiative (IFI)** is the country's first statewide non-profit volunteer fatherhood organization. Founded in 1997, IFI connects children and fathers by promoting responsible fathering and helping equip men to become better fathers and father figures. *Results*: Through its volunteer board of directors and board of advisors, IFI creates strategic partnerships with private and non-profit organizations. Its activities include the Illinois Father-of-the-Year Essay Contest (over 140,000 school-age children have submitted essays during the past three years) on the theme, "What My Father Means to Me;" a *Me & My Dad* essay booklet that includes essays, artwork and a six-part curriculum focused on child-father issues; a Faces of Fatherhood Calendar; an Illinois Fathers' Resource Guide; a quarterly newsletter; and a Boot Camp for New Dads, a hospital-based program which brings together first-time dads with soon to be first-time dads to help them make the transition to fathering.

APPENDICES

Internet Resources of Organizations

The following Internet sites of organizations host a variety of resources for assisting fathers and mothers in their lives as parents. Many other sites exist and they are often accessible from sites such as the following.

At-Home Dad. This is a quarterly newsletter that promotes the home-based father.
http://www.parentsplace.com/family/dads

Baby Center. This site is for new and expectant fathers, with information on preconception, pregnancy, babies and toddlers.
http://www.babycenter.com

Bay Area Male Involvement Network. The network is a partnership of Bay Area child services agency workers to increase the involvement of fathers in the lives of their children. It has a male involvement curriculum for training teachers in early childhood education.
http://www.bamin.org

Center for Successful Fathering. This site works to increase awareness of the essential role of fatherhood. Timely and relevant skills are discussed.
http://www.fathering.org

Child Trends. Their publication list on fatherhood includes reports, papers and other resources in several critical social areas.
http://www.childtrends.org

Daddy's Home. This is an online resource for primary caregiving fathers.
http://www.daddyshome.com

D.A.D.S. (Directing All Dads to Success). This site provides support, education and varied resources to help dads, along with a discussion forum.
http://www.dadsinc.com

FamilyEducation Network. This site brings local, state, and national educational resources together in one place. Their goals include helping parents to be more involved with schools and education.
http://www.familyeducation.com

Fathers' Forum Online. This site is dedicated primarily to expectant and new fathers with children up to the age of two.
http://www.fathersforum.com

Fathers' Network. This site serves fathers of children with special needs, namely, chronic illness and developmental disability.

http://www.fathersnetwork.org

FatherWork. This site contains personal stories from fathers and children, as well as ideas to promote good fathering under various challenging circumstances.

http://www.fatherwork.byu.edu

Fedstats. More than 70 agencies of the federal government produce statistics of interest (including fathering) to the public and this site provides access to the full range of them.

http://www.fedstats.gov

Kidsource OnLine. This is an online community that shares values and goals in raising, educating and providing for children. Their goal is to find and deliver the best of health-care and education information.

http://www.kidsource.com

National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy. This site seeks to prevent teen pregnancy by supporting values and stimulating actions that are consistent with a pregnancy-free adolescence.

http://www.teenpregnancy.org

National Center for Fathering. This site conducts research and distributes data on fathers and fathering. Practical resources are available for dads in nearly every fathering situation.

http://www.fathers.com

National Center for Strategic Non-profit Planning and Community Leadership. This site provides details about NPCL's public and customized workshop series to help community-based organizations and public agencies better serve young, low-income single fathers and fragile families.

http://www.npcl.org

National Center on Fathers and Families. NCOFF's goal is to improve the life chances of children and the efficacy of families. NCOFF supports the conduct and dissemination of research that advances father involvement.

http://www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu

National Fatherhood Initiative. This site highlights the importance of dads to the well-being of their children and the entire community. They organize coalitions and promote a pro-fathering message to dads.

http://www.fatherhood.org

National Head Start Association. The "Father Friendly Assessment and Planning Tool" provides checklists for programs to assess their readiness to serve fathers and to develop

a father-friendly action plan. A joint effort of the National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership; the United States Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, Region V; and the Illinois Department of Public Aid, Division of Child Support Enforcement, this tool is available at

http:/www.nhsa.org/partner/fatherhood/ffanp.htm

National Latino Fatherhood and Family Institute. This site highlights programs for serving Latino fathers and families.

http://www.nlffi.org

University of Minnesota's Children, Youth and Family Consortium--FatherNet. This is the Consortium's answer to the "Father to Father" initiative. Minnesota was the first state to launch this initiative, and this site has an abundance of state links and resource information.

http://www.cyfc.umn.edu/Fathernet

Zero to Three. This organization promotes the healthy development of babies and young children by promoting good child development practices for mothers, fathers and providers of child care.

http://www.zerotothree.org

Resources from the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

U.S. Department of Education

Call:

- 1-800-USA-LEARN
- 1-877-4ED-PUBS (1-877-433-7827)

Visit:

- http://pfie.ed.gov (Partnership for Family Involvement in Education)
- www.nces.ed.gov/pubs98/fathers/index.html (EDPubs)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Call:

- 1-703-683-2878 (Head Start publications office)

Visit:

- http://fatherhood.hhs.gov

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OVERVIEW

The Partnership for Family Involvement in Education

PARTNERSHIP for Family Involvement in Education

"Better Education Is Everybody's Business"
—U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley

What We Do
The Partnership's mission and activities

- Increase opportunities for families to be more involved in their children's learning at school and at home.
- Strengthen schools and improve student achievement levels.

Who We Are We are thousands of partners joined together in a growing grassroots movement to support student learning according to high standards. We come from families, schools, and a variety of businesses, communities, and religions, and are organized into four groups: Family-School Partners, Employers for Learning, Community Organizations, and Religious Groups.

The Benefits of Joining

- Connect with other groups to share ideas about educating our nation's children;
- Work together to increase and improve efforts to help children learn;
- Get the latest information about family involvement in education and related activities; and
- Receive recognition for visible commitments to education at the local, state, and national levels.

Local Activities of Partners

At the local level, partners support efforts to:

- Strengthen family-school partnerships through good communication and mutual responsibility for children's learning;
- Adopt family- and student-friendly business practices;
- Provide before- and after-school learning activities for children;
- Make effective use of facilities-schools, community buildings, churches-for children and families; and
- Give parents the resources, training, and information they need to help children learn, and teachers and principals the tools they need to engage families.

Nationwide Activities of the Partnership

In addition to the numerous local activities in which Partnership members are involved, many participate in nationwide activities such as the following:

Helping children read throughout the summer and the school year. Known as the *America Reads Challenge*, this activity focuses on maintaining and developing children's reading skills during the summer months and before and after school. Participating children read and write for thirty minutes every day with teenage and adult partners who share a love of reading with them.

Supporting learning right from the beginning of the new school year. Known as *America Goes Back to School*, this activity brings Americans together during the months of August through October to share their experiences and talents with children in schools across the country. Going back to school with children sends the message of participants' year-long commitment to helping students learn and supporting schools in their efforts.

Planting the seeds of college attendance. Known as *Think College Early*, this initiative helps increase awareness about the importance of attending college and builds support for middle and high school students to take the courses needed to enter college and to be prepared financially.

Keeping kids safe and smart all the time. Supported by the *21st Century Community Learning Centers* grant program, before- and after-school planned activities expand learning opportunities for children in safe and drug-free environments.

To join and for more information call 1-800-USA-LEARN or visit the Web site at <http://pfie.ed.gov>.

PARTNERSHIP
for Family
Involvement
in Education

PARTNERSHIP FOR FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION

Partner Registration

To join and receive your Partnership Promise Certificate, enter the information requested below and mail or fax to: Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, 400 Maryland Avenue, SW, Washington, DC 20202-8173. Fax: 202-205-9133.

The registration must include a contact person and phone number in order to be processed. The information you provide may be made available by the U.S. Department of Education on the web, and, in any event, is subject to the Freedom of Information Act, and will be made available to requestors upon request.

We would like to become a member of the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education. We commit to family-friendly practices and will work with others to form partnerships that support children's learning.

Name of Partner group or school: _____

Address line 1: _____

Address line 2: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: _____ Fax: _____

Contact Information:

Head of Organization: _____

Contact Name: _____ E-mail: _____

Is your organization a(n) (Please check one):

☐Family-School Partner ☐Employer for Learning
☐Community Organization ☐Religious Group

OMB Number: 1860-0505 Expiration Date: 10/31/2001

According to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, no persons are required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a valid OMB control number. The valid OMB control number for this information collection is 1860-0505. The time required to complete this information collection is estimated to average 5 minutes per response, including the time to review instructions, search existing data resources, gather the data needed, and complete and review the information collection. If you have any comments concerning the accuracy the time estimate or suggestions for improving this form, please write to: U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202-4651.

✸As a ***Family-School Partner***, our school will be welcoming to families; offer challenging courses; create safe and drug-free learning environments; organize tutoring and other opportunities to improve student learning; and support the inclusion of families in the school decision-making process.

Our families will monitor student attendance, homework completion and television watching; take time with and listen to their children; become acquainted with teachers, administrators and the school staff; read with younger children and share a good book with a teen; volunteer in school when possible; and participate in the school decision-making process. ***We pledge to*** --

- Share responsibility at school and at home to give students a better education and a good start in life.
- Promote effective two-way communication between families and schools, by schools reducing educational jargon and breaking down cultural and language barriers and by families staying in touch with the school.
- Provide opportunities for families to learn how to help their children succeed in school and for the school staff members to work with families.
- Support family-school efforts to improve student learning by reviewing progress regularly and strengthening cooperative actions.

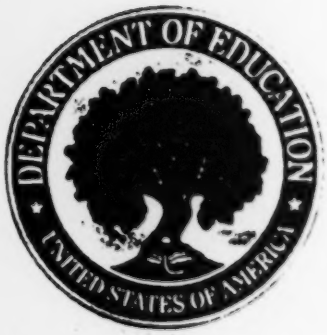
✸As ***Employers for Learning Partner***, we recognize that a strong and vigorous economy, for our businesses and our nation, depends upon an educated, skilled, and competent citizenry. Today's students are tomorrow's citizens and our long-term investments for the future. ***We pledge to*** --

- Identify a contact person, authorized to explore and develop options for company involvement in our family-school-community initiatives.
- Take action to implement programs.
- Share best practices after evaluating programs annually.
- Form partnerships to promote, implement, and improve family-friendly policies and practices.

✸As a ***Community-based Organization Partner***, we support family-school compacts and affirm the importance of family-community involvement in students learning. ***We pledge to*** --

- Make safe schools/safe neighborhoods a priority.
- Combat alcohol, drugs, and violence in and around schools and neighborhoods.
- Reinforce parenting skills using community institutions to provide family and literacy training and referral services.
- Provide mentoring and homework help programs so that children may be assured of tutoring and guidance from knowledgeable and responsible adults.
- Come together to coordinate delivery of services and to eliminate duplication of efforts.
- Help develop and sponsor affordable and quality learning, cultural and recreational activities after school, on weekends and during the summer.
- Support school improvement efforts in the local community.
- Support and become informed about school governance issues.
- Encourage schools to be involved in the life of the community, through co-sponsorship of community outreach activities of partner organizations.

✸As a ***Religious Communities Partner***, we affirm the vital and enduring role of families in the education of children. We have always regarded families--and parents in particular--as the primary teachers of children. Encouraged by Secretary of Education Richard Riley's concern for all children and his commitment to the role of families in educating children, we call upon all people of good will to stand as one with us in support of families' participation in children's learning.



PARTNERSHIP
for Family
Involvement
in Education